

The Deployed Commander's Information Band of Tolerance

The process of receiving, assimilating, filtering and conveying relevant information to an individual is a challenge that every Army leader will experience. Over the course of many combat deployments, it becomes evident that the concept of too much or too little information can cost commanders their ability to make sound decisions. Outlining information and determining for the commander where the critical decision must be made set the conditions for success.

The 4th Fires Brigade at Camp Liberty, Baghdad, Iraq, has taken information management to the next level. During pre-deployment training and the beginning phases of the 4th Infantry Division's (4th ID's) role in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 05-07, the fires brigade sought ways to improve and streamline the application of information management.

Based on the principle of an information

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band of tolerance (IBOT) that falls in a spectrum of all available information, the optimal amount of information conveyed is that required to make a viable decision. (See the IBOT model in the figure on Page 34.) The top line of the model is the theoretical state when all information flowing in for decision-making would be too overwhelming. Consequently, it does not support decision-making requirements. The bottom line represents minimal information flow and, again, does not lead to an effective decision.

The "garrison" or peacetime environment on the model encourages a wide IBOT. Leaders can accept and manage more information and discard irrelevant information in garrison. They also can accept less information because they can request more information later, if needed. In garrison, it is common for leaders to be presented

the same information many times before a decision is needed.

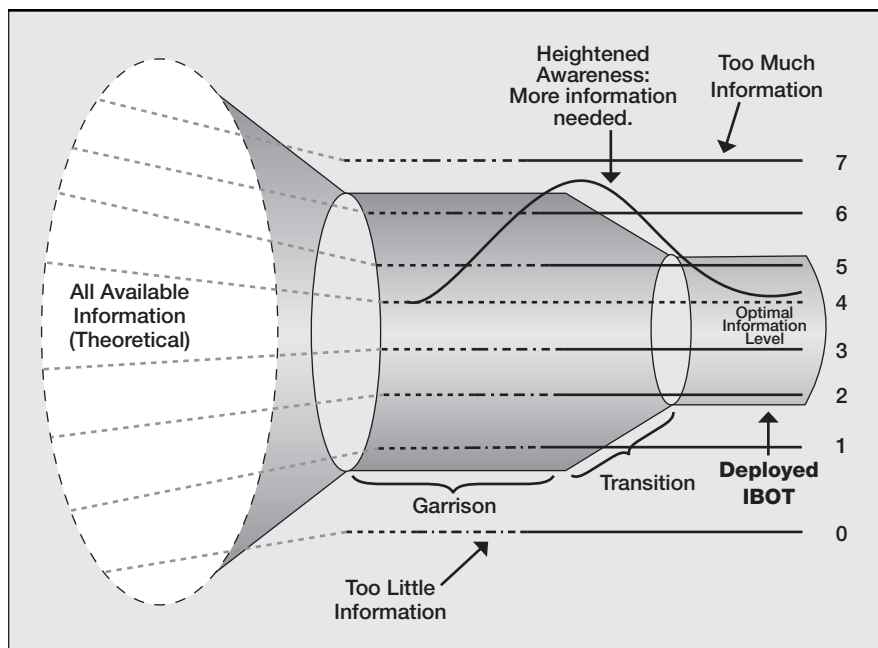
The IBOT model represents the change in information flow as a unit transitions from garrison to wartime operations.

Leaders in a deployed unit make far more critical decisions than garrison leaders on a daily basis. In fact, almost every decision a deployed leader makes has implications for accomplishing the mission and the well being of Soldiers.

In the high-stress deployment environment, the IBOT is much smaller and the information flow is more concise. The potential severe consequences of a poor decision force this IBOT into a tighter "band." Too much information wastes time and clutters the decision-making process. Too little information causes the leader to either make the wrong decision due to simple ignorance or requires a request for more information, which wastes time at a critical moment.

During a combat deployment, those key decisions that produce a measurable effect (positive or negative) on the commander's unit are greater in number and individual importance. This greater number of critical decisions is based on the principle that leaders are programmed to have certain levels of interest in decisions of varying severity made in their units.





Information Band of Tolerance (IBOT) Model. When an incident occurs, the deployed commander may need more information on that specific event for a period of time, as shown as a “wavelength” through the IBOT model.

However, the leader who focuses on everything, focuses on nothing.

Limitations imposed on a leader’s schedule always have the same result: inefficient use of time leads to untimely or poor decisions. A staff that can effectively “manipulate” time by focusing on a narrow IBOT will create an environment that is conducive to decision making.

IBOT Movement. Think of the IBOT as a band of “wavelengths.” The total IBOT rarely fluctuates as a whole. A variety of different topics comprise the IBOT, and this represents the sum of the scope of interest for a particular command.

Each topic or potential topic has an individual wavelength. As these topics become more or less relevant, their corresponding wavelengths increase and decrease in magnitude.

The total number of wavelengths is infinite and is normally situationally dependent. The commander dictates to the staff the necessary topics, and the staff must anticipate any topics that require a decision in the near future.

The wavelength of a subject in the IBOT will increase or decrease as a result of specific events or lack of events. An increased IBOT wavelength will convey more information while a decreased wavelength conveys less. This shift in direction is the result of an action (or lack of action) that requires more (or less) information. The acceptable level of information prior to the event is no

longer applicable.

The increased IBOT is usually a result of a significant event (but can be due to the *anticipation* of one). For example, an indirect fire incident that kills local nationals requires more information for the commander (increase the IBOT). An effective staff must anticipate this need for information instead of waiting for guidance. Higher headquarters certainly will require more information. If a mosque is blown up, the staff will need additional information on the event and related topics. Too often the staff does not work to predict what additional information is required, and the 1900 battle update brief (BUB) goes as planned, no matter the situation.

The increased IBOT model applies to planned events also. It is obvious that more information is required for certain operations, but an effective staff can take information from commanders, staff and other units to anticipate and provide an increased IBOT.

For example, a trend in negligent weapons discharges across the division could increase the IBOT. Even if a commander did not experience such incidents, he can anticipate the possibility, given the trend, and avoid an incident with a properly focused IBOT. His staff should provide this information and encourage a course of action (COA) *before* the event.

A decrease in an IBOT wavelength is not necessarily due to a lack of interest. It also can be attributed to a staff that

can take control of that subject area and maintain adequate decision-making tools for its boss.

Eventually, as leaders begin to delegate less important missions to others and focus on “hot” topics, the IBOT on the remaining issues will move down. The commander’s focus is on topics he deems crucial at that time. As information on areas of lesser importance is stripped out of the IBOT, more time and resources can be dedicated to the commander’s priority areas.

The staff, however, must maintain visibility on all areas and topics. A focused IBOT does not negate the need for encompassing awareness; it just de-emphasizes the more stable topics. If a leader reaches a point on a topic where he is comfortable with the end state and there is no fluctuation, the IBOT decreases.

Managing the Information: Filtering the IBOT. There are a number of things that staffs and subordinate commanders can do to ensure the commander gets the information he needs to make good decisions.

- Design the garrison IBOT to reflect the deployment IBOT—create an information flow environment that works in garrison and during deployments. The staff and subordinate commanders must work to make information flow more concisely and efficiently (an acceptable reduction) in garrison. Although leaders can manage a wider, less efficient IBOT band in a less stressful environment, this requires the unit to revise its information flow techniques once deployed. This change causes an initial “shock” effect; once deployed, units waste valuable time re-learning information conveyance methods to make the information more concise.

For example, units should eradicate the “marathon” email traffic that has become rote and commonplace in garrison. Inept, long and cumbersome briefings have become a standard in many units as well. These bog down and clutter the decision-making process.

- Understand times and reasons for IBOT movement and plan accordingly. If a high-visibility event happens, the staff and commanders immediately can assume that the IBOT must respond, and the commander will need more information. Subordinate leaders must shift the IBOT in anticipation of the commander’s needs.

- Make a concerted effort to structure the information flow to the boss in a

concise manner. One of former III Corps Commander Lieutenant General Thomas Metz's remarks was "It takes a lot more talent and an efficient thinking process to write a functional one-page information paper on a topic than to develop a 20-page slide show."

Too many units have gotten into the habit of overwhelming leaders with information, beating them into submission with nonessential details.

The more difficult and complicated tasks should receive more attention in the process of "packaging" the important information for the commander. The information should clearly outline the topic, providing the commander the information he needs—not *all* the information on the topic, much of which is superfluous. The briefer/writer should examine the sequence and packaging of his information in terms of how the info will affect the commander's comprehension.

- Identify and examine those subjects the commander is getting too much information on and reduce the corresponding wavelengths or delete the topics altogether. The boss does not need information that does not affect his wartime mission—it is irrelevant information. This is a complicated but crucial issue. Subordinates can handle certain issues without dragging the boss "down into the rat hole" with them.

It is unavoidable that sometimes a staff member or a subordinate commander will "miss the mark" and withhold information from the commander that required his input or influence. But for the most part, the busy commander will appreciate the staff's keeping the less critical issues "off his plate."

- Give the commander a simple, functional means to gain the information he needs—develop methods that present data effectively in an information-rich manner. Too often, we see subordinates sending huge email files for leaders to try to print or read on the screen—printing the info or reading it on the screen are not efficient or clear ways for him to get the information. Subordinate commanders and staff should not send the commander slides on email but give him a hard copy so he can see and touch the information, quickly jot down a couple of notes on it and return the product with valuable input and guidance.

The "clipboard method" is a proven technique that reduces confusion and saves time. Instead of being hammered by questions that require some immedi-

ate research, staff and subordinate commanders can provide the boss a clipboard with five to 10 highlights, recent events, or answers to questions that he had the previous day. Standardized background information should be on the back of the clipboard for quick reference.

This technique is especially handy for meetings. During the meeting, the boss can write notes on it. The next day, the staff can have the answers to his questions on the clipboard. This method saves time for the boss and the subordinate.

IBOT Dispersion. There are certain aspects of today's Army that have become institutionalized and, unfortunately, cause a "dispersion" of the information in the IBOT instead of focusing on the right information. These are information flow "killers." Subordinates must negate these unhelpful habits and techniques. A few of these institutionalized bad habits are long emails, meetings the commander doesn't need to attend, unnecessary recurring meetings, too many commander's critical information requirements (CCIR), staff burn out, not factoring in the commander's experience level and not keeping the information (and action) at the lowest level possible.

Long Emails. Emails with "FYI" or "see below" and no summary are ineffective and cumbersome. Information conveyed via CDs, websites and internet portals are equally ineffective for leaders. Leaders should not be forced to search for the information they need—have to track it down in forums or search a table of contents on a CD.

If these tools are absolutely necessary, the subordinate should request permission to find the site, bookmark it and provide methods to help the boss collect information. Subordinates should be dedicated to assimilating valuable, actionable information.

Non-Commander Meetings. Subordinates should cover meetings for the boss, whenever possible. After the meeting, the subordinate composes a one-page summary of key events. Ideally this concise document is a "stand-alone" and does not require a briefing.

This process helps the commander in two ways: he saves time by not having to attend meetings and can read the summaries at his convenience. Counting preparation time, movement to and from the meeting and the meeting (most of which are more than an hour), this process saves the commander a considerable chunk of valuable time. Most meetings can be concisely summarized

in a functional one-page paper or briefed in about 15 minutes.

Unnecessary Recurring Meetings. The recurring meeting has become a "staple" in the Army. Many times, these meetings evolve into tortuous sessions of endurance with about 20 percent of the meeting applicable to any one attendee.

Each staff must take a hard look at these meetings and reevaluate the "take away" value. Was it worth 90 minutes of everyone's day? Could this information have been conveyed or distributed more effectively? Are you smarter or better equipped for having attended the meeting? Would a more streamlined one-on-one forum with key personnel have been more productive? Some of these recurring meetings are unavoidable due to the high visibility of the topic.

Maintenance meetings come to the forefront of many mechanized units. This is typically a forum to convey the maintenance status of all non-mission capable (NMC) vehicles to the senior maintenance officer (executive officer, or XO). However, if all units come to these meetings with the same information they leave with, what was the value added? If subordinate leaders are diligent in providing the right information to superiors, then these meetings become unnecessary.

Too Many CCIRs. Subordinates must evaluate the CCIRs progress aggressively in garrison and then plan the changes to those CCIRs in combat. Does the commander still want to be notified about issues that are in the realm of the rear detachment command? Does a CCIR require a decision by the commander? If so, clearly tell him where in the briefing he can expect to make that decision. Attempt to streamline this process so that subordinate leaders are empowered.

Staff Burn Out. A heightened level of the staff's mental and physical conditioning is imperative for a unit to be effective in combat operations. A common pitfall of a staff is to attempt to work itself to death. This can crush an otherwise effective staff during a deployment.

The staff effectiveness threshold for a continuous operational tempo (OPTEMPO) of more than 12-hour days is about six months. Most units still can produce acceptable products until then.

An attempt to work increased hours on a daily schedule for longer will prove disastrous for most personnel. Leaders must force each other to work no longer than eight to 10 hours a day, if at all possible. They also must establish a viable

physical training regimen for themselves as well as their Soldiers.

Units need a method to enforce personal time, social functions, staff interaction and rest and relaxation time. To the “Type A” personality, this seems like a waste of time, but the aggregate or composite dividend over the course of a year is higher, and the staff maintains a higher mental acuity. Leaders must plan for the long term.

Not Considering the Experience of the Decision Maker. Senior leaders are capable of making decisions with less input than junior leaders because they have detailed cognitive schemata based on years of experience. Junior leaders will require more information because of their lack of operational experience. That need for more information should not overflow into the information provided the more senior decision maker.

Information (and Action) Not Kept at the Lowest Level. Leaders must resist the temptation to “reach” down to a much lower level (team, section or platoon) for information digitally just because

they can. Currently, the Army has the ability to give general officers accurate, real-time information about section-level actions and allow them to communicate guidance to the sections directly, if they choose. The problem is that a more senior leader or staff member using this method “trumps” the junior leader and, in the long run, cripples the process by which the junior leader learns how to make important decisions. Senior leaders should foster the decision-making skills of subordinates.

Senior leaders should empower their subordinates with as much responsibility as they can handle.

A staff’s application of the IBOT model requires a level of diligence and a resistance to information overload. An initial effort is required at every engagement to streamline the flow of information. However, this process becomes faster and more effective over time. Eventually, the IBOT becomes the greatest contributor to the unit’s time management and the boss’s level of knowledge, ability to make decisions and personal efficacy.

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FUBAR to Fobbit: War Influences Language

History shows that when the US armed forces go to war, they also give birth to new American language. Every war gives rise to cutting-edge terminology and unique slang terms.

What is war’s influence over words? Grant Barrett, author of *The Official Dictionary of Unofficial English*, notes that new military jargon and slang are an inevitable by-product of a tight-knit group with a focused purpose working together in tense situations requiring verbal shortcuts. Language is also one of the ways Soldiers can be creative.

From the first World Wars, terms such as “FUBAR,” (or the Vietnam-era FUBAB—which stands for F%#\$!* up beyond all belief) “AWOL,” “think tank,” “Dear John” and “white knuckle” seeped into popular culture. Today, with the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), new words are appearing that give insight into the daily lives of Coalition Soldiers fighting in the Middle East. Here are several terms that are fresh out of GWOT.

• **Angel**—n. Among military personnel in Iraq, a Soldier killed in combat is an angel.

• **Fobbit**—n. From FOB plus hobbit,

a Soldier or other person stationed at a secure forward operating base (FOB) is a fobbit, hence, someone who seeks the security and comfort of a well protected military base. Variations are “FOB monkey” or “base camp commando.”

• **Ali Baba**—n. or v. An Ali Baba is a thief. After the government of Saddam Hussein was toppled, looting ravaged Iraq—most anything of value was stolen or destroyed. Iraqis call looters and thieves “Ali Baba” after the tale of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” told by Scheherazade in the stories known in the West as *One Thousand and One Nights*.

American Soldiers serving in Iraq say they tend to use the term not as a noun but as a verb meaning “to steal”: “We’re going to Ali Baba some scrap metal from their junkyard.”

• **Hillbilly Armor**—n. Hillbilly armor is scavenged materials Soldiers use for improvised bulletproofing and vehicle hardening in Iraq. American Soldiers jerry-rigged vehicles in attempts to harden them against enemy weapons or explosives.

• **Mortaritaville or Mortarville**—n. Mortaritaville or Mortarville is a military base that is attacked regularly. It usually

refers to Logistic Support Area (LSA) Anaconda near Balad, Iraq, although an informant says that a multicolored “Welcome to Mortaritaville” sign was displayed at Log Base Seitz (also known as “Seitzkatraz” or “Impact Zone Seitz”) in late 2003. Mortaritaville is a play on the Jimmy Buffet song “Margaritaville.”

• **Backdoor Draft**—n. A backdoor draft is an extension of military enlistments through stop-loss orders that force personnel to extend their tours of duty.

• **Shako Mako**—n. An Arabic term that loosely is translated as “What’s up?” or more specifically, “What do and don’t you have?” or “What’s there and not there?” It is commonly one of the first Iraqi-Arabic expressions Coalition Forces learn. A common response is *kilshi mako* or “Nothing’s new.”

While it’s too soon to tell if these words will outlast Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), such words fill the niche created by Soldiers functioning under unique—and often extreme—circumstances.

The Official Dictionary of Unofficial English by Grant Barrett is published by McGraw-Hill Companies, ISBN 0-07-145804-2, and costs \$14.95 for the paperback.